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ABSTRACT

Efforts to improve and extend the educational programs of the University of Minnesota take place through a number of mechanisms, some formal, many informal. Among the mechanisms established to provide a formal basis for such efforts are the Small Grants Program of the all-University Council on Liberal Education (CLE), and the University Educational Development Program. Recent efforts to evaluate their collective effect on the educational process are summarized. Information was sought from full-time faculty who were divided into two groups: Users, who received grants from one or both of the programs, and Non-Users, who did not. Data were based on questionnaires returned by 267 Users and 441 Non-Users. In general, both Users and Non-Users indicated substantial support for the founding principles of the programs and for their continuation as important means of maintaining the vitality of university educational programs. The information regarding supported projects provides important insights into such areas as differences in approach between Users of the two programs, the role of grants in the faculty reward system, the perseverance of the effect of supported projects, and the role of educational development in expanding faculty perspectives. Areas of needed improvement are also identified. (LBH)

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comment
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Evaluation shows 'U' faculty support for educational development programs

Efforts to improve and extend the educational programs of the University of Minnesota take place through a number of mechanisms, some formal, many informal. Among the mechanisms established to provide a formal basis for such efforts are the Small Grants Program of the all-University Council on Liberal Education (CLE), and the University Educational Development Program. This issue of Comment *summarizes a report on a recent effort to evaluate their collective effect on the educational process.*

The ***Small Grants Program,*** *founded by CLE in 1967, supports faculty and faculty-student efforts aimed at the improvement of undergraduate education, especially liberal education. Grants range from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars.*

The ***Educational Development Program*** *was founded in 1970 by action of the Regents upon the recommendation of the University Senate. The EDP grew out of the University's successful experience with the Small Grants Program, and was designed to meet development needs at all levels of educational responsibility of the institution. Grants have ranged from a few hundred dollars to twenty thousand dollars.*

Recipients, non-recipients sampled

The Center for Educational Development, which administers both programs, began an evaluation of them in spring, 1974. Information was sought from University of Minnesota faculty members about (a) their knowledge and opinions of the programs, (b) the factors which stimulate and shape educational development efforts, and (c) the impact of funded projects on both the grant recipient and the institution. The study was done to provide information for use by CLE and the University Committee on Educational Development in formulating policy for the programs, and to assist in making operating decisions.

For purposes of the study, full-time faculty were divided into two groups: Users —those who have received grants from one or both of the programs, and Non-Users —those who have not received a grant. Except for department chairpersons, individuals holding full- or part-time administrative appointments were eliminated from the pool. This was done to prevent possible "administrative" bias in the faculty samples and, in the case of the Users, to exclude information about administratively oriented projects, which might not be strictly comparable with those of full-time faculty members. Individuals who had been notified of grant awards within the five months immediately preceding the distribution of the survey were not included in the Users sample. This process resulted in a list of 453 Users; 296 questionnaires were returned of which 267 were sufficiently complete for analysis. (The

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267 usable returns reported on 317 projects, since several individuals had received more than one grant.)

A Non-Users group was compiled by selecting a 25 per cent random sample of full-time faculty members, stratified by rank and college, and then eliminating all who qualified as Users. This produced a sample of 739 Non-Users; 480 questionnaires were returned, of which 441 were usable.

PART I—THE GRANT PROGRAMS

The first section of the evaluation focused on the Small Grants Program and Educational Development Program. The questionnaire sought information regarding faculty awareness of, attitudes toward, and participation in the programs.

Awareness of the programs. About one in five Non-Users (22 per cent) reported that they had never heard of the Small Grants Program, seven years old at that time. More than a quarter (29 per cent) had never heard of the then-four-year-old Educational Development Program.

Why some don't apply. Non-Users who *had* heard of the programs but had never applied for a grant were asked why they had not done so. A number of possible reasons were listed, and respondents were asked to indicate the degree of importance for each:

TABLE ONE

Agreement on the Importance of Three Purposes of Educational Development Programs

Purposes	Respondents	Agreement (in Percent of Responses)						
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Indifferent	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Other	Total
To establish formally the University responsibility for the improvement of educational practice.	Users	60.2	34.9	2.3	1.1	1.5	–	100.0
	Non-Users	46.0	43.5	5.6	3.1	1.5	.3	100.0
To insure to all units the availability of flexible resources for development of educational programs.	Users	60.7	32.4	4.6	1.9	.4	–	100.0
	Non-Users	45.4	46.3	4.6	2.5	.9	.3	100.0
To provide for a planned, systematic and open procedure for the development of educational programs	Users	47.7	36.8	8.5	5.8	1.2	–	100.0
	Non-Users	37.4	43.0	10.7	5.0	1.6	.3	100.0
Total	Users	56.2	34.7	5.1	2.9	1.1	–	100.0
	Non-Users	42.9	44.9	7.0	3.6	1.3	.3	100.0

"of no importance," "of some importance," "quite important," or "very important." The most frequently cited reasons, together with the percentage of respondents rating them either "quite important" or "very important," were:

Probability of being awarded a grant is too small	38%
Haven't felt the need to engage in special development projects	35%
Don't think the hassle of submitting a proposal is worth it	30%
Did not understand how to proceed	25%
Have financed educational development projects through internal departmental or collegiate resources	25%
Did not receive encouragement from department or college administration	22%
Have financed educational development projects through external funding agencies	15%

One hundred respondents supplied reasons of their own, nearly half of them citing lack of time as an important reason for not applying. Commented one: "When you're up to your ass in alligators it's hard to remember you're in here to drain the swamp."

How valid are the programs' purposes? Legislation establishing the Educational Development Program defines three purposes of internal programs for educational renewal and change. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with these purposes. The full range of their responses can be seen in Table One.

Although Users are somewhat more enthusiastic in their support of the programs' purposes than Non-Users, it can be seen that more than 80 per cent of all respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" with each of the stated purposes.

Respondents also were asked to rate the *effectiveness* of the Small Grants Program and Educational Development Program in fulfilling each of the stated purposes. Using a five-point scale (from "very effective" to "very ineffective"), 62 per cent of the Users and 43 per cent of the Non-Users termed the programs "effective" or "very effective" with respect to all three purposes. Many respondents indicated that they did not have sufficient knowledge to make such a judgment.

How important are educational development programs? As might be expected, individuals who have received grants expressed more support for the system than Non-Users. Nevertheless, support of both groups for the programs is very high. (It might be added that Non-Users who had unsuccessfully submitted proposals were somewhat more supportive of the programs than those who had never applied.)

Both Users and Non-Users were asked to rate the importance of the Small Grants Program and Educational Development Program in light of today's financial stringency. Three statements were provided; those statements, and percentages of Users and Non-Users selecting each as their preference, are as follows:

	(Users)	*(Non-Users)*
They are more important than ever to help maintain the vitality of University programs through renewal and innovation	*60%*	*44%*
They are important but it is even more important not to reduce resources needed to maintain existing programs in their present state	*27%*	*32%*
Resources for the operation and development of instructional programs should be budgeted entirely in the teaching unit	*8%*	*16%*
Other (including combinations of the above)	*5%*	*8%*

PART II—THE PROJECTS

The second portion of the evaluation questionnaire was designed to provide a picture of the process and impact of educational development, as it takes place through individual projects. Faculty who have received grants from either the Small Grants Program or the Educational Development Program were asked to respond to a series of questions about their funded projects.

Conceiving the idea and applying for the grant

The first three questions asked about grants trace the sequence of events from the initial decision to depart from past instructional practice, through the shaping of that effort, to the application for funds to support the project.

What led to the project? To determine what events or conditions signaled the need for educational development, Users were given a list of ten possible items and asked to rate their importance in initiating the project: none, slight, moderate, or great. Answers were tabulated separately for Users of the two programs. Four responses led the list of factors rated of "moderate" or "great" importance by both groups:

	(SGP)	(EDP)
Improvement in instructional technology	63%	58%
A visceral feeling	56%	50%
Change in the discipline or profession	46%	44%
Change in departmental procedure or emphasis	33%	43%

While the order of the most popular responses is the same for both groups, there are some interesting differences in percentages on these and other items. It can be seen that *improvement in instructional technology* and *a visceral feeling* were somewhat more important to Users of the Small Grants Program than to Users of the Educational Development Program. This is consistent with a general finding that projects supported by the Small Grants Program, more than those sponsored by the Educational Development Program, tend to be idiosyncratic—conceptualized and managed by the faculty member in a "solo" fashion. Similarly, it is not surprising to find that EDP-supported projects derive more often from *change in departmental procedure or emphasis* (and, farther down the list, *change in college procedures or emphasis*) than do those supported by the Small Grants Program.

Other responses indicate that projects supported by the Small Grants Program more often tend to be prompted by a sense of *student dissatisfaction with a course or program*, while those sponsored by the Educational Development Program more often are a response to perceived *peer or colleague dissatisfaction with a course or program*. Finally, EDP-supported projects tend more often to be prompted by *hearing about success with the idea elsewhere*.

Shaping the project. Users of both programs were asked to rate the importance of various conditions or events in shaping the project after a decision has been made that something needs to be done. Of the eight suggested items, three led both groups' list of items of "moderate" or "great" importance (other choices were "no" or "slight" importance):

	(SGP)	(EDP)
Discussions with discipline-related colleagues	68%	78%
Discussions with students	64%	66%
Discussions with individuals in supportive fields (media specialists, educational psychologists, etc.)	44%	47%

The finding that all of these factors were reported more important to the shaping of EDP-supported projects again characterizes those projects as more often involving broad consultation and participation. Small Grants Program projects, meanwhile, are more individual efforts.

Student evaluations were identified as being of moderate or great importance by 27 percent of each group. *Conference papers, journal articles,* and *books and monographs* were of lesser importance to both groups.

Why apply to SGP or EDP? Users were asked to indicate what specific conditions or events stimulated them to apply to either the Small Grants Program or Educational Development Program for support of their projects. Again, four levels of importance were possible: none, slight, moderate, or great. The most significant factors, and the percentage of respondents rating them of "moderate" or "great" importance:

	(SGP)	(EDP)
Lack of available money from regular departmental or collegiate sources	89%	90%
Announcement of availability of funds from these programs	88%	85%
Lack of available money from sources other than colleges or departments	73%	68%
Encouragement of departmental or collegiate administrators	55%	71%
Recommendation of colleagues	41%	54%

Again in keeping with the nature of the two programs, the latter two factors were more significant

to Users of the Educational Development Program than of the Small Grants Program.

How projects affect University instruction

A central concern in the evaluation was to gain information about the life span of the results of supported projects, the dissemination of results, and the contributions of projects to instructional effectiveness and efficiency.

Some developmental, some complete. At the time of the survey, one-third of the projects being reported on were still in the developmental stage. Thirty-six per cent had been completed less than two years, 31 per cent two years or more.

Current status of project. Respondents were asked to report the status of the results of their project at the time of the survey. Status of the 204 *completed* projects was reported as follows:

Expanded and continued	*32%*
Continued in original form	*31%*
Reduced in scope and continued	*14%*
Curtailed	*11%*

Other responses were given by 12 per cent of the respondents. Most of their comments indicate that project results are having some kind of continuing impact on the institution or that the faculty member sees the project as having continued potential given certain changes in existing departmental or collegiate conditions.

If a project is to continue beyond the developmental stage, it must be supported by regular operating resources of the University rather than by development funds. It is significant that 63 per cent of all completed projects are reported to have been assimilated into the regular operating programs of the University in their original or expanded form.

Results are used by others. Seventy-three per cent of Users report that project results have been used by *other instructors in their own department;* 35 per cent report that project results have been used at *other colleges and universities;* 32 per cent report use by *other units of the University of Minnesota.*

Results of EDP-supported projects are reported to be used slightly more often by other individuals at the University of Minnesota (both within and outside the grant recipient's department), while results of Small Grants Program projects are more likely to be used at other institutions.

It is clear from comments volunteered under this question that funded projects not only are used in their original form but often serve to stimulate additional development activity. For example, one User wrote:

> The results of our study of media-aided foreign language courses are now used by five other languages, have been published in a national journal, and are being used as far away as the Philippines.

Another User commented:

> I have a young instructor working with me who has now adopted some of the instructional methods we have used in this project. He is now modifying and expanding these techniques in his own way.

Some unanticipated outcomes. Almost half the respondents (49 per cent) said they had encountered some *positive, unanticipated results* of their projects. Many of these cited high levels of student enthusiasm; others found their new approach more effective than anticipated or found that it led to even further development. A smaller proportion, 11 per cent, indicated *negative, unanticipated results.* The most frequently mentioned was the amount of faculty time and effort required, with logistic problems running a distant but important second.

Projects' effects on student learning. Respondents were given a list of six possible effects their projects may have had on instructional effectiveness or efficiency, and asked to check all that applied. Their responses:

Students learn something different	*66%*
Students enjoy the experience more	*63%*
More students learn the subject	*39%*
Students retain what they learn longer	*30%*
Students learn the same with less resource investment	*17%*
Students learn the same by working less	*8%*

The frequency with which it is reported that

students learn something different documents the significant role played by these programs in restructuring the curriculum. Many of the funded projects addressed the changing nature of the disciplines through the addition of new courses, and the development of course arrangements reflecting an interdisciplinary focus.

How projects affect the faculty member

While the impact of supported projects upon the University is an important area of investigation, the survey also sought information about the perceived impact of such projects upon the faculty members who conceived and supervised them. Specifically, the questionnaire asked about the effect of the project on the faculty member's conception of his or her discipline, conception of education, and standing in the department.

Change in conception of discipline. More than a third of the respondents (36 per cent) reported that their development efforts had some impact on their conception of their discipline. In individual comments, some indicated that the project had a broadening effect on their lives, as exemplified by the following:

> In development, contact with other professionals in other regions expanded my appreciation of problems in the field and acquainted me with solutions now being attempted.

Another individual reported that work on the project provided an opportunity to "learn about different specialties."

A frequent response was that work on a funded project provided an opportunity to focus on special problems or gain new insights into the discipline. One individual reported that "my knowledge and skill in the particular subject matter of the project has been sharpened considerably." Another indicated that the project "sparked debate in the department about the prevalent methodology within the discipline."

Many individuals said the project helped stimulate or enable them to do further curricular refinement. For example, one reported that the project resulted in "improved...ability to more efficiently develop future units."

The roles of projects in suggesting interdisciplinary efforts was also documented by the comments.

Change in conception of education. More than half the respondents (53 per cent) report some change in their conception of education as a result of their projects. By far, the majority of individual comments indicated that success with the pedagogical technique being tested provided reinforcement for their ideas about teaching. One individual wrote:

> To some extent, the conception changed *before* and hence *prompted* the proposal, but it is a continuing process. What I think I gained was a more reasonable, eclectic, and interdisciplinary view of what are appropriate discipline demands on *undergraduate* students.

Another individual said:

> I have a much higher estimate of the potential for computer-assisted instruction as a part of a total instructional program. I also realize that it is not the best type of instruction for *all* students, but that it does meet the needs of students with certain learning styles and can be used as an adjunct to other types of instruction.

To be sure, not all of the lessons learned were positive ones. One respondent reported simply that "if the student doesn't go along with the prof, the whole thing can be a flop." Another echoed a feeling voiced by many in response to this question and others on the questionnaire:

> (I experienced a) strong awakening to the degree to which faculty are constrained, by the 'system's' pressures for time for research, from seeing as desirable that time be invested in other than traditional classroom modes of teaching.

Full report will be available

A full report of the evaluation study will be available for distribution by mid-summer. Anyone wishing to be added to the distribution list may call the Center for Educational Development, (612) 373-4537. Those who contributed to the study and have already requested a copy are already on the list.

Standing in the department. More than a quarter of all respondents (28 per cent) felt they experienced some change in standing within their department as a result of receiving a grant. More recipients of grants from the Small Grants Program reported a significant impact (31 per cent) than did recipients of Educational Development Program support (24 per cent).

For some, the change was clear and unequivocal, as witnessed by the rather startling avowal that as a result of receiving a grant the individual became chairman of the department. Others were less certain, but thought the grant *may* have had some effect:

> I believe it was a plus in tenure and promotion considerations. I was also selected to chair departmental curriculum committee.

> Probably helped in early promotion to assistant professor.

> I was given tenure this year. I like to think obtaining this grant had something to do with it.

> Personal standing and course standing appeared to be enhanced. Provided visibility among colleagues.

Some said the work done through the grant is pointed to as an example for others:

> Many others in our department have begun to follow our method of teaching which we were able to start because of the grant we received. We have been used as models to show how innovation is important in teaching.

Others reported that the grant provided an opportunity for increased personal efficiency. One individual wrote, for example, that the grant "freed me to continue my work and enhanced my productivity."

The majority of individuals, however, reported no change in standing as a result of the grant. Some said research and publication are primary activities for obtaining reward in their departments, and that educational development is viewed as being of distinctly secondary importance. One individual wrote that "current emphasis seems to be on publications and not necessarily on teaching effectiveness, although lip service is paid to this." Another said "promotion, tenure, and salary increases are dependent solely on research productivity, despite public pronouncements."

Many who commented under this category, however, simply said they were "not aware" of any changes, or that as senior faculty members their standing was unaffected by such a grant.

Recipients of grants through the Small Grants Program reported change in departmental standing more frequently than recipients of support from the Educational Development Program. This may be attributed to at least two conditions. First, as previously noted, there is some evidence that recipients of grants through the Small Grants Program are rather more independent when compared with their colleagues. It would appear that grant awards tend to heighten their visibility among colleagues, whether or not improvement of instruction is highly valued in their department. Secondly, the Educational Development Program is operated in such a way that there is generally wider discussion within a unit regarding needs for development. Thus, both receipt of the grant and results of the work are more generally anticipated and less often a "surprise" to colleagues.

COMMENT: *The study of faculty perceptions of the Small Grants Program and the Educational Development Program has produced useful information about them and how they function.*

In general, the faculty (both Users and Non-Users) has indicated substantial support for the founding principles of the programs and for their continuation as important means of maintaining the vitality of University educational programs.

The information regarding supported projects provides important insights into such areas as differences in approach between Users of the two programs, the role of grants in the faculty reward system, the perseverance of the effect of supported projects, and the role of educational development in expanding faculty perspectives.

The study also identified some areas of program operation which require improvement. For instance, the number of faculty who said they were unaware of the programs suggests a need for more successful methods of disseminating information.

Appropriate modification of policy and improvement of operating procedures for University programs must rest on the informed advice of those for whom the programs exist. Combined with sensitive and energetic day-to-day leadership, such evaluations can be the basic resource for academic decision-making. We think this study successfully contributes to our best tradition of University governance.